

PAT'S STORY



Chapter 1. The early days....

To write about my twenty-nine years of working at the JDA would take a couple of volumes, and I don't think our Editor, Kay, would be too happy about that! So I will do my best to try to remember some of the memorable events of the past.

My first contact with deaf people came in September 1970 when I went for an interview as "very very" part time Administrative Assistant to Dora Margulies who was the Organising Secretary/Warden at 90 Cazenove Road. The first deaf person I met was clearing up the forecourt and I can truthfully say that there was no communication problem. (I am sure you all know who that person is).

I was married with two young children and had not been out to work for some years, so I was pretty nervous at the interview and when Mrs Margulies asked me questions about charity work, I told her that apart from putting money in charity boxes, I really did not know anything. Being a very wise lady, she could see that I was a "pretty intelligent young woman" and would quickly learn – so I got the job. In any case I don't think at that time anybody was eager to take on a job for only six hours a week.

I started by sending out the Rosh Hashanah Appeal. Being a housewife for some eight years, a normally boring job to some, to me was exciting. BUT more excitement was to come when the appeal money started coming in.

The JDA was only about twenty years old when I started and the only staff, apart from Mrs Margulies and myself, were two part time cleaners, one being Marie Madden who later became the Housekeeper. Times were changing and so were voluntary organisations and my volume of work grew.

After three years, I was needed for twenty hours a week and gradually, I came more and more into contact with our members by attending the various parties, the Seder Service and taking on some of the welfare work as well as the office work.

I enjoyed the personal contact with the members and I made any excuse to go down into the canteen to have a cup of tea and a chat. The members and I soon became friends, exchanging stories about our lives. Communication did not seem to be a problem between us but when I heard that there were going to be some sign language courses starting on an academic basis, I signed up at the City Lit and started to learn sign language properly in 1982/3.

Then Mrs Margulies decided to retire and I was asked to take over. Sadly she passed away before she could enjoy any retirement and I was on my own. During those years, we shared ideas and tried to progress the work of the JDA together.

Chapter Two. Pat is now the Director...

In 1983, I was appointed Executive Director. Welfare work was taking on a new image and we decided to change our Friendship Club into a Day Centre where our members could come and have lunch and an afternoon activity. Our staff was still small but we got the chance to build when a Government sponsored scheme was introduced. It meant that we could take on unemployed people and the Government would pay their wages. Most charities took advantage of the scheme and we did too. Some of the people we took on were very suitable so when the scheme finished we kept them on our staff.

I was always looking for schemes to improve the services and amongst other projects I

continued from previous page

managed to get the use of the Hackney Community Transport Minibuses (we still use them). We employed a cook so that the Wednesday Day Centre members could have a nice hot lunch.

A lot happened during the eighties – we started sponsoring our members to take part in sporting events, educational projects etc. We started a sign language class and Stoke Newington Police sent some of their officers to learn – all the time we were building up the image of the JDA. I started to go out to give talks to various groups and discovered that the profoundly deaf and hard of hearing people had different problems. Our work focused on the profoundly deaf but what about the hard of hearing? This worried me so I did some research....lots of research.....and came up with the idea that we needed an advisory service where hard of hearing people could come for information.

This idea was supported by other deaf organisations and the Sensory Impairment Team of Hackney Social Services. My plans went into action and after about ten months we opened our first Resource Centre in my old office on the ground floor at 90 Cazenove Road in March 1992.

The Wednesday members were curious as to why I had moved my office to the top of the building. I told them the ground floor office was going to be an equipment room and was pleased that some of our members wanted to take advantage of the new equipment. This proved to me that the Resource Room should be available to deaf and hard of hearing people to include people of all faiths. There were not many Resource Centres around.

We had a Grand Opening with Desmond Wilcox as the Guest of Honour and he confessed that he had a very severe hearing loss. The same evening I was asked to go along to Greater London Radio to speak about the new project and guess who interviewed me? None other than Vanessa Feltz, who was not so famous then.

Many hard of hearing people and professional Social Workers visited the Resource Centre and we were invited to go out with our bag of portable equipment to give talks and demonstrations. The idea spread and I asked the JDA Council if we could open another Resource Centre in North West London. Mr Gee lost no time in finding me a room in Golders Green and I was delighted when Helen Rabin joined the staff to run the Golders Green Centre together with a band of dedicated volunteers.

Many hard of hearing people are now able to live a more fulfilling life with the aid of the technology and I am extremely proud that I was the person who started up the Resource Centre project.

Chapter Three. On The Move...

For the last few years it was the members' wish to move away from Cazenove Road and although I have not yet mentioned my Committee, I must do so now as they listened carefully and made the decision to sell and buy. EASIER SAID THAN DONE. We had an idea of where we wanted to go and when the Woodside Park site was suggested, the Executive Council together with myself and some of the members approved the location. It was a bare piece of land and it seemed it was just waiting for us.

90 Cazenove Road was put up for sale and due to the tremendous efforts of our late Norman Prozzer; it was sold to the neighbours.

The next two years were a time for worry, laughter, joy and tears. The plans were approved and altered and approved and altered again. Barnet Council had to be notified of every little change, which delayed the builders and frustrated us.

Horror of horrors, the date came when we had to move and the new building was not ready. My conscience would not let me run away although I wanted to! Instead Mr Gee found us a place in Aylmer Parade, East Finchley and there we remained for seven months. I arranged for our Day Centre to use the

continued from previous page

Muswell Hill Synagogue Hall for the Wednesday meetings. More delay meant that we had to find another home for our Day Centre and we were all very delighted to join Jewish Care's Stamford Hill Centre where the Director and staff made us most welcome.

In February 1998 we moved into Julius Newman House, Woodside Park bit by bit. The Official Opening in June was an exciting occasion and I was glad I hadn't run away when I wanted to! We now have a terrific staff. Kathy, after a lengthy period making up her mind came with us. Helen moved in with us to run the Resource Room together with Judith Morgan who previously worked at Cazenove Road.

We soon became complete with Katy Solomon and Kay Kaufman joining the staff and Mira Goldberg moving in with Koleinu. Ivan Clements very ably drives the Minibus from Stamford Hill so that our members living there get to the Centre with no difficulty.

The planned projects were put into production. Our sign language classes under the direction of Kay and Irene Spielsinger have resulted in a wonderful pass mark for the Stage 1 BSL. Our computer classes under Martin Bogard are very well attended and the various other activities are up and running. The Central Committee is very active, so in the short time that we have been in Woodside Park, we are doing very well.

Chapter Four. All good things come to an end...

I look back over the years and see how much technology, especially the minicomms (remember the first ones bought by Mrs Fairweather who I am still in touch with), the fax and computer technology such as the Internet and E-mails have opened the world for deaf people, I am truly happy. In the beginning I quite missed the members coming into the office asking me to make phone calls for them.

My own work has touched many peoples' lives. I have made many many friends. I have

celebrated simchas with the members, Barmitzvah's, marriages, anniversaries and birthdays and I have shed tears with them when we suffered a bereavement. We all need support from each other in this world and under the umbrella of the JDA we are able to obtain this. My title was "Executive Director" but I preferred to be called "friend".

All good things come to an end, and I decided to retire knowing that the JDA is a very successful organisation, respected and admired and that I could sit back and reflect on having done a very satisfactory job. Anybody that is part of the JDA, whether they be a member, staff, volunteer or Council should be very proud and indeed the outgoing Executive Director (me) certainly is.

All the staff at the JDA work well together. Our Caretakers Howard and Angela have settled in and go out of their way to help us all. The volunteers are very special and I appreciate their input.

Chapter Five. The Future.....

I will still be around from time to time as the Council have asked me to be a Consultant so happily we will still be in touch. I am absolutely certain that you will all welcome the new Executive Director, Susan Cipin. Some of you were worried about my retiring and who would come in my place. You need not worry – Susan will carry on the good work of the JDA, but she will need your support and help as well.

Twenty nine years is a long time and during that time I have received wonderful support and encouragement from George and Evelyn Gee, our President and Chairman and all of the Hon Officers, so I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere thanks to them but I also want you, the members, to know how much I have always appreciated the love and friendship you have shown to me and Monty.

PAT